

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF DISABILITY, ITS MEANING AND EXPERIENCE AMONG “PAKAKAYOR” ETHNIC GROUP IN THE NORTH OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to understand the social and cultural dimensions of disability in terms of the meaning of disability, management of disability in the Pakakayor community, an ethnic group in Thailand, and experiences of disabled people and their families. This study focused on beliefs and behavior related to disability and interaction among disabled people, their families and community. An ethnographic study was conducted in Huai Yao village in Chiangmai Province. The data was collected over four months as embedding in the community, using several techniques such as in-depth interviews, key informants interviews, participatory observations and a focus group discussion.

The research found that meaning of disability of Pakakayor is obviously physical impairment, which made people unable to work and take care themselves in the daily lives. Working is a very crucial matter for the Pakakayor to survive. Thus, people who can work, although with an impairment, is not a disability. For disabled people in Pakakayor's meaning, they need a caretaker, particular from their family. The caretaker was expected to be a female such as a mother, grandmother or sister. The Pakakayor constructed the meaning of disability by traditional beliefs together with medical knowledge. They expected to have medical treatment and rehabilitation. However this study found that they cannot access health care effectively due to a lack of transportation and money, including fear of rejection and stigma.

Recommendations from this research is suggested to medical staff, who work with disabled persons especially people from ethnic groups, who should take into account the traditional beliefs, as well as the social and cultural contexts in order to achieve an effective health service.

KEY WORDS: DISABLED / PAKAKAYOR / ETHNIC / SOCIAL-CULTURAL

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